



California Regional Water Quality Control Board Central Valley Region

Karl E. Longley, ScD, P.E., Chair

Linda S. Adams
Secretary for
Environmental
Protection

1685 E Street, Fresno, California 93706
(559) 445-5116 • Fax (559) 445-5910
<http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley>



Arnold
Schwarzenegger
Governor

27 July 2009

Linda MacKay, President
TriCounty Watchdogs
P.O. Box 2458
Frazier Park, CA 93225

TEJON MOUNTAIN VILLAGE PROJECT, KERN COUNTY

Thank you for your 29 June letter addressed to Board Member Sandra Meraz expressing the concerns of TriCounty Watchdogs (TriCounty) about the proposed Tejon Mountain Village (TMV) project near Lebec and current management of Castac Lake. The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, (Regional Water Board) has prepared a response on behalf of Ms. Meraz.

Your letter requests that the Regional Water Board investigate potential impacts from activities at Castac Lake and potential impacts on the local water supply. The following summarizes TriCounty's concerns and subsequently describes actions taken and information gathered to date by Regional Board staff.

TriCounty's concerns relate primarily to Tejon Ranch Company's (TRC) reported use of groundwater to artificially maintain the level of Castac Lake as well as other lake management practices. These concerns are listed as follows:

1. The volume of groundwater that is being used to maintain lake may adversely affect the quantity and quality of groundwater for other users.
2. The lake can no longer serve as a catch basin for run off, which will result in increased downstream flooding.
3. Exclusion of Castac Lake from the "project" described in the draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the TMV project serves to reduce environmental review and expedite the process of approval to build the large housing project.
4. TriCounty has heard reports that the lake has been dredged to reduce its salinity and to enlarge its capacity without proper regulatory oversight.
5. The lake is being aerated and manipulated in other ways that have changed its ecology.
6. The conversion of the lake from ephemeral lake into a permanent lake has changed its ecology.
7. The water quality of the lake has been compromised as has the water quality of Grapevine creek, which is downstream from the lake. TriCounty comes to this conclusion based on data in the DEIR that shows very poor water quality in Grapevine Creek near the lake, with improvement at sampling sites farther away as it mixes with other sources.

California Environmental Protection Agency



Recycled Paper

On 13 July, Regional Water Board staff provided, as a responsible agency under the California Environmental Quality Act, comments on the DEIR to Kern County (copy enclosed). The comments address concerns 1, 2, and 3 above and should result in further investigation and/or clarification by Kern County and TRC. Regional Water Board staff will monitor the County's response; however, since groundwater pumping and flooding under the described conditions are issues largely outside the purview of the Regional Water Board, further investigation may require coordination with other agencies.

On 14 July, Regional Water Board staff inspected Castac Lake and the surrounding area and spoke with representatives of TRC. The inspector did not observe any evidence that TRC has dredged the lake or otherwise modified it to increase its capacity. Representatives from TRC stated that the Company has never dredged the lake. TRC did acknowledge that in 2005/2006 it did remove Sago pond weed from the lake. If you can provide evidence that TRC or any other entity has conducted unauthorized dredge or fill activities in the lake, we will review the evidence.

Regarding concerns 5 and 6, the DEIR notes that the Tejon Ranch Company has artificially maintained the lake level using groundwater since 2001 and operates an aeration system to maintain dissolved oxygen levels. Tejon Ranch Company representatives indicated in a 15 July teleconference the Company does not intend to artificially maintain the lake level. The Company also indicated that it operates the aeration system with the concurrence of the California Department of Fish and Game. Regional Water Board staff is collecting additional information regarding these matters.

Regarding concern No. 7, the data in the DEIR appears to be consistent with a hydrologic system like the Castac Lake and Grapevine Creek system. Alkali lakes are expected to have poor mineral quality due to the high evaporation rates that concentrate the salts in the lake water. Consequently, groundwater underlying alkali lakes is usually of poor quality. Based on the DEIR and information and documents referenced therein, water percolating from Castac Lake may provide some base flow for upper Grapevine Creek. This base flow would be similar in quality to the water in Castac Lake. Water quality farther down the Creek would be expected to improve as the creek gains water from fresher spring sources and surface and groundwater flows originating primarily from precipitation in tributary watersheds. Board staff is collecting additional information regarding this issue.

Thank you again for your letter. We believe the above addresses all your concerns expressed in your letter; however, if you have any questions or would like to discuss this issue further, please contact me at (559) 445-5116 or Dale Harvey, Senior Engineer on my staff at (559) 445-6190.

Sincerely,



Pamela C. Creedon
Executive Officer

Enclosure: 13 July Board letter

cc: Board Member Sandra O. Meraz, Alpaugh
Board Member Soapy Mulholland, Springville